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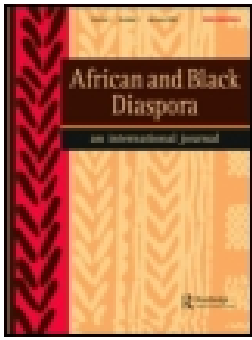
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## Deported before experiencing the good sides of migration: Ethiopians returning from Saudi Arabia

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## Deported before experiencing the good sides of migration: Ethiopians returning from Saudi Arabia

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### ABSTRACT

In the period November 2013–April 2014 more than 160,000 Ethiopians were deported from Saudi Arabia after a seven months amnesty period for undocumented migrants came to an end. This large-scale regularization campaign of the Saudi government must be seen in light of the ‘Arab Spring’, when popular uprisings in the Middle East were threatening dictatorial regimes. The effect of the Arab Spring was felt globally; the uprisings impacted upon migrants living in countries in the Middle East and on their countries of origin. This paper looks into the experiences of Ethiopian deportees prior, during and after their forced return. We argue that the fact that the migrants were not prepared for their sudden return affected their economic, social network and psychosocial embeddedness back in Ethiopia. In addition, the Ethiopian government has not been able to improve the returnees’ economic embeddedness, which has affected their social and psychological status negatively.

### KEYWORDS

Deportation; forced return migration; globalization; preparedness; embeddedness; Ethiopia; Saudi Arabia

## Introduction

Salam had worked five years as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia when she was deported to Ethiopia in the beginning of 2014. Hoping to help her parents and siblings back home she returned empty-handed. ‘We were deported before we could experience the good sides of migration’, she said in an interview. Salam is one of the 163,000 Ethiopian migrants that were forced to return from Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia after an amnesty period for undocumented migrants came to an end in November 2013. Saudi Arabia’s large-scale campaign to regularize the migrant population was an indirect result of the ‘Arab Spring’ and underlines the global dimension of a seemingly regional migration issue. The popular protests in Tunisia and Egypt were mainly about high unemployment rates and widespread corruption practices. Afraid of similar protests, the Saudi government proactively addressed these issues. The two main reforms implemented were the ‘Saudization’ of the workforce and a multi-dimensional campaign against undocumented migrants (De Bel-Air 2014, 4).<sup>1</sup> In April 2013, the Saudi government announced a seven months period in which undocumented migrants could regularize their residence and employment status or

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leave the country without having to pay a penalty for the time they had been undocumented. In the period April–November 2013, 4.7 million undocumented migrants were regularized, and 1 million migrants left the country (De Bel-Air 2014, 10).

After the expiration of the amnesty period, the Saudi Ministry of Labor carried out raids on labor sites and the police arrested undocumented migrants in their homes and on the street. The crackdown was accompanied by severe human rights abuses, including arbitrary detention, theft of migrants' belongings, rape, beatings, and killings (see HRW 2013). In November 2013, the Ethiopian government decided to repatriate all undocumented migrants from Saudi Arabia, facilitated by international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration, UNICEF, and the Red Cross. Within a period of four months Ethiopia received more than 160,000 returnees, many traumatized by the experiences during their arrest and deportation. The forced return of Ethiopians from Saudi Arabia was an indirect result of the Arab uprisings and shows that the uprisings also impacted upon migrants living in countries in the Middle East, and on their countries of origin. The effect of the 'Arab Spring' was felt globally.

This paper discusses the experiences and expectations of Ethiopian migrants during and after their repatriation in the context of globalization. Most of the literature on forced return migration and deportation is based on South–North migration. Very few studies have looked at deportation in the Global South. The case of Ethiopians who were forced to return from Saudi Arabia can shed new light on the debate about deportation and its consequences. We focus in particular on the discussion about the relationship between migrant's preparedness to return home and their resulting embeddedness in their home societies.

The paper is structured as follows. We first introduce our theoretical framework, and then briefly describe the history of Ethiopian migration to the Middle East and to Saudi Arabia in particular. After the methodology we present some data on the backgrounds of the respondents. We then move on to discuss the preparedness and embeddedness of Ethiopian return migrants. The paper is based on material collected during a two months fieldwork period in Addis Ababa in April–May 2014 as part of the Master research of Tafesse (2014).

## Forced return migration: theoretical perspectives

For a long time, migration studies focused on the experiences of migrants in the countries of migration. Since the 1980s more attention is being paid to return migration. In the beginning the focus was largely on voluntary return migration; forced return migration and deportation were often neglected (see, for example, Gmelch 1980; Cassarino 2004). In his theoretical overview of perspectives on return migration, Cassarino (2004) also pays relatively little attention to forced return. However, his notion of preparedness is very useful when studying forced return migration. He argues that the ways in which migrants are able to mobilize resources for their return home and their preparedness are crucial for a successful return.

Preparedness pertains not only to the willingness of migrants to return home, but also to their *readiness* to return. In other words, the returnee's preparedness refers to a voluntary act that must be supported by the gathering of sufficient resources and information about post-return conditions at home. (Cassarino 2004, 271)

Cassarino distinguishes three groups of returnees based on their preparedness to return, including those returnees whose level of preparedness is non-existent: 'These returnees neither contemplated return nor did they provide for the preparation of return. Circumstances in host countries prompted them to leave, for example as a result of a rejected application for asylum or following forced repatriation' (Cassarino 2004, 275).

In the past decade a body of scholarship has emerged about forced return migration and deportation (see, for example, De Genova 2002; Peutz 2006; Ellermann 2009; Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009; De Genova and Peutz 2010). Attention to the consequences of forced return migration has increased rapidly because of the tightening of borders worldwide. Governments of Western countries in particular, but also those in other parts of the world, are becoming more and more reluctant to accept refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, border controls have increased in order to prevent undocumented migrants from entering the country. The global war on terror has also contributed to the stricter border controls. These restrictive immigration and asylum policies have created a new interest in the most suitable conditions of return (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009, 909). Governments and international organizations are concerned with the question how refugees, asylum seekers and migrants whose applications for residence permits were rejected can be assisted so that their return will become sustainable.<sup>2</sup>

Ruben, van Houte, and Davids (2009) developed a framework to understand the factors that influence the process of re-embeddedness of forced return migrants. 'Embeddedness refers to the ways how individuals find and define their position in society, feel a sense of belonging and possibilities for participation in society' (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009, 910). They distinguish three dimensions of embeddedness: economic embeddedness, social network embeddedness, and psychosocial embeddedness (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009, 910). Their study is based on surveys and interviews with 178 return migrants and stakeholders in 6 countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Vietnam. While they focus on forced return migration from the North to the South, their framework is also very useful to understand similar processes in the South, such as the forced return of Ethiopians from Saudi Arabia.

According to Ruben, van Houte, and Davids (2009), a sustainable embeddedness of return migrants is affected by three factors. First, the individual characteristics of migrants, such as age, gender, education, and religion affect the ways in which migrants experiences their return. Second, the migration cycle the migrant went through affects his or her experiences, such as the reason for leaving the home country, the situation in the host country, the length of stay abroad and the conditions of return. Third, the pre-and post-return forms of assistance delivered by the state, private, or civic organizations are important for the ways in which forced return migrants will be re-embedded in their home societies (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009, 914). On the basis of the collected data Ruben, van Houte, and Davids (2009) conclude that most returnees were economically still highly vulnerable and lacked future prospects. Socially, many returnees depended on family and close friends and had difficulties building up social networks that would increase their sense of belonging. The psychosocial status of the forced return migrants depended very much on personal and contextual factors (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009, 931–932). Traumatic experiences before migration, feelings of unsafety upon return and frustrating migration experiences abroad affect the notion of belonging back home (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009). The assistance returnees receive is often

limited to temporary financial support (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009). A considerable number of returnees mentioned that they would leave again if they had the chance to do so (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009, 924).

Ruben, van Houte, and Davids' (2009) conclusions are based on the experiences of migrants who had been back in their home countries for a much longer time than the Ethiopian migrants that returned from Saudi Arabia. In addition, the return migrants they studied had not been forcefully expelled. Yet, the focus on economic, social network, and psychosocial embeddedness is in our opinion also relevant for our study. A number of conclusions were particularly relevant such as the fact that single return migrants and female migrants had more difficulties becoming socially embedded again. Also the fact that most return migrants had difficulties to embed themselves economically corresponds with our findings in Ethiopia. Ruben, van Houte, and Davids (2009) conclude that return migrants with children were more successful economically than single and female return migrants (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009, 928). Migrants who had sent remittances were also able to mediate their economic situation upon return (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009). With regard to psychosocial embeddedness, female migrants, especially those who were not married, had a lower psychosocial well-being. In addition, migrants who had been able to live in independent housing in the country of migration had maintained their self-esteem in contrast with those who had lived in shelters and reception centers.

In the following part of the paper, we will use the concept of preparedness from the literature on voluntary return (Cassarino 2004) and the concept of embeddedness from the literature on forced return (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009) to analyze the experiences of Ethiopian return migrants. Our main argument is that migrants who are forcefully expelled have no possibilities to prepare themselves for their return, which greatly affects their embeddedness in their home societies. We first give more background information about Ethiopian migration to the Middle East and present the methodology of the study.

## Ethiopian migration to the Middle East

Historically, Ethiopia and the Middle East have been closely related for centuries (see Erlich 1994, 2007). The movements of slaves, soldiers, merchants, traders, laborers, tourists, pilgrims, priests, and scholars have been accompanied by the circulations of commodities, money, language, ideas, and religion. More recently, labor migration has become one of the most prominent features of the relationship between Ethiopia and the Middle East, and the Arabian Peninsula in particular. While labor migration was restricted under the military regime of Mengistu, the government that came to power in 1991 made the freedom of movement a constitutional right. Despite economic liberalization policies and Ethiopia's integration in the global economy, many Ethiopians consider out-migration as the only way to achieve better living standards. Educated people in urban areas have difficulties finding paid jobs in both the public and the private sector. In rural areas poverty prevails despite the government's efforts to develop the countryside economically. As a result numerous Ethiopians are trying to reach Saudi Arabia via Djibouti and Yemen. They migrate over land to South Africa, or cross the border with Sudan in order to travel on to Libya, Egypt, Israel, Turkey and countries in Europe.

The large majority of regular migrants to the Middle East are women. In the past two decades particularly young women have migrated to the Middle East (see, for example, Kebede 2001; Fernandez 2010; de Regt 2010; Minaye 2012). They respond to the demand for paid domestic labor among middle and upper middle class families in Lebanon, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia where African women have increasingly replaced Asian domestic workers (Fernandez 2010, 251). In an interview, a representative of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) reported that licensed Ethiopian overseas recruitment agencies received 182,000 applications for work in 2012–2013, a small decrease from the number received in 2011. The Ministry estimated that this represents only 30 to 40 percent of all Ethiopians migrating to the Middle East. The remaining 60 to 70 percent are either trafficked or smuggled with the facilitation of illegal brokers (see Fernandez 2013). On 19 October 2013, the Ethiopian government installed a ban on labor migration from Ethiopia to the Middle East as a response to the human rights violations against Ethiopian migrants, which was still in place at the time of writing (May 2015). Such bans had been installed before, but this time they apply to every country in the Middle East.

In most countries in the Middle East, the *kafala* system of sponsorship binds migrant workers' residence permits to 'sponsoring' employers, whose written consent is required for workers to change employers or leave the country. A migrant cannot change his or her sponsor or job unless a release from the sponsor is issued, along with a new sponsorship from a new employer and an approval from the concerned authorities. Those who do so without permission are considered undocumented or illegal and liable for imprisonment and deportation. According to a representative of the Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs of Addis Ababa most of the migrants that were arrested during the Saudi government's crackdown and deportation of undocumented migrants were women who had ran away from their sponsors. Widespread migration irregularity and deportation can be seen as a direct result of the *kafala* system.

Saudi Arabia is one of the main destination countries for Ethiopian migrants. According to a report by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat in Nairobi, around 100,000 regular Ethiopian labor migrants moved to Saudi Arabia in 2011 (RMMS 2014, 17). In the first half of 2012 over 160,000 domestic workers migrated to Saudi Arabia, which was ten times more than the year before. The large majority (96 percent) were women. Most Ethiopian women who migrate to Saudi Arabia are unmarried Muslim women who have finished at least some years of secondary education (Fernandez 2010, 253). They are often coming from rural areas and intend to help their families back home. Those who migrated via regular channels sometimes attended a short pre-departure training at the MOLSA in Addis Ababa. These trainings cover legal rights, the content and terms of employment contracts and information on whom to contact in case of problems (RMMS 2014, 24). Yet, in most cases they are unprepared for the work they have to do, they are unfamiliar with modern household equipment, and they do not speak Arabic. Upon arrival they are often confronted with a heavy workload and no day off, they face emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, their passports are withheld as part of the *kafala* system and sometimes they are denied their salaries (see Kebede 2001; Fernandez 2010; Dessiye 2011; ILO 2011). Irregular migration to Saudi Arabia, via Djibouti and Yemen, consists mainly of men (RMMS 2014, 17), which explains why a considerable part of the returnees were male. Male migrants were mainly employed as guards, as daily laborers and on farms.



## Methodology

The data on which this paper is based was collected during two months fieldwork in Addis Ababa (April–May 2014). Of the 163,000 deportees 2 percent (around 3,000) originated from Addis Ababa; the large majority came from areas outside Addis Ababa and returned to their home communities (IOM 2014, 1). The study was based on quantitative and qualitative methods. First, a survey was carried out among 168 returnees who had registered at the city administration. The sample population comprised of deportees who were formerly residents of Addis Ababa and who arrived between 4 November 2013 and 24 March 2014. In contrast with the national number of male deportees (62 percent according to the IOM) (IOM 2014), in Addis Ababa almost 75 percent are female returnees. From the 3,000 returnees from Addis Ababa, 2,748 returnees asked for assistance from the city administration. According to the key informant from the Addis Ababa Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs some returnees were not included in the support program, either because they were not in need of support or for other reasons. Provision of assistance was conducted in two phases. In the first phase 1,999 returnees were included in the program and in the second phase 749 returnees. At the time of the survey only the first group was known to the city administration; therefore 1,999 deportees were taken as the survey population.

Despite the availability of a list of registered returnees, conducting random sampling was found challenging and very costly. Thus, we decided to conduct stratified sampling. Five areas in the city where returnees came together for various reasons<sup>3</sup> were selected randomly.<sup>4</sup> Three of them were meeting halls, the fourth was a vocational training college, and the fifth place was a place where returnees had started working with the support of the government reintegration assistance program. In these places every fifth returnee was given a questionnaire. Two data collectors were employed to assist illiterate people and those who found it difficult to respond in writing. In total 200 questionnaires were distributed, of which 168 questionnaires were returned (the response rate was 84 percent). The study did not include interviews with the families of returnees, traffickers, sending agencies, brokers, smugglers, or others affected by or engaged in migration to Saudi Arabia. Yet, these actors may have affected the experiences and future expectations of the returnees and therefore issues related to these actors are included in the study.

In addition to the survey, eight in-depth interviews were conducted with a selected number of returnees. Expert interviews were carried out with people working in organizations involved in the repatriation. These key informants included an expert working at the IOM office in Addis Ababa, government officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the MOLSA, and an expert at the Addis Ababa City Administration Labor Office. They were interviewed about their respective roles in relation to the repatriation process, the assistance provided, the measures taken to minimize the costs of migration, and the future plans of action in relation to repatriated migrants. Moreover, these stakeholders provided information on the general situation of return migrants from Saudi Arabia within the specific time period. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with male and female returnees.

## Background of the respondents

Age, gender, socioeconomic, and marital status of individuals influence the ways in which migrants experience their return (Ghanem 2003, 19; Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009,



916). In addition, socioeconomic and demographic characteristics may help to understand the reasons why people migrated, which may also have affected their possibility of employment and adjustment in the destination country (see Hammond 1999). In the case of Ethiopia, educational qualifications and gender are important variables affecting the type of work migrants are engaged in and their exposure to maltreatment and abuse. With regard to the gender of the respondents, 69 percent of the 168 respondents were female and 31 percent male. In terms of age distribution, the majority (87.7 percent) of the respondents were between the ages of 18–35; the number of respondents that were older was 13 percent. There were no respondents under 18, which may be related to the fact that minors are officially not allowed to migrate abroad and many young migrants change their age on their birth certificates.

The educational level of the interviewed returnees ranged from illiterates to college degree holders. Of the 168 respondents, 1.8 percent was illiterate, 5.4 percent were able to read or write, and 43.5 percent had only achieved elementary level. Those who had attended senior secondary education (9–12 years) comprised 22 percent; 29 percent had finished secondary school (completed grade 10/12). Only 3 percent graduated from a college. The fact that the large majority was not very educated affected the type of work they were engaged in and the possibility of employment upon return to Ethiopia. In addition, the educational level of returnees determined to some extent their access for assistance after their return home. For example, 30 returnees were given the opportunity to join the Health College in Addis Ababa. Moreover, lower educational levels can also lead to lower capacity to demand one's rights and increased susceptibility to deception.

In terms of religion, 36.9 percent of the respondents were Muslim and 51.2 percent were Orthodox Christians. Protestants comprised 10.7 percent of the respondents and only 2 of the 168 respondents were Catholics. In some cases labor migrants decide to change their religion in order to be accepted for migration, or they converted after having worked in a Muslim majority country. The data on marital status of the respondents indicate that nearly 60 percent of the returnees were single, almost 30 percent were married and the remaining 10 percent were previously married (separated, divorced, or widowed). Most of the single migrants were women (70 percent).

While lack of employment opportunities are often mentioned as the main reasons for migration, there was a considerable number of people employed prior to migration (31 percent) or they owned small businesses (22 percent). Interestingly, 18.4 percent were not yet part of the formal labor force (students and housewives). The remaining 28.6 percent had been unemployed. Those who had a means of income prior to migration said that they earned on average between 500–1000 ETB per month (25–50 USD). The fact that a considerable number of return migrants were employed prior to migration can be explained by their residence in Addis Ababa, where job opportunities are better than in the rural areas.

### **Migration motivations and trajectories**

The major driving forces behind the migration of respondents were failure in education endeavors, a strong desire for success or change, hearing success stories of others (often from former friends or relatives who migrated from their locality to Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States), divorce, death of spouse or parents, the desire to be independent,

underemployment, limited job opportunities and a low family income. Saudi Arabia was seen as an attractive destination for migration for a number of reasons, such as the relative easiness of accessing a residence permit (*iqama*), the minimum requirements of educational qualification and skills, the availability of free-visa or visa on demand (visa that can be collected with no other pre-condition) and the role of traffickers and smugglers in artificially creating demands. Economic transformations in Saudi Arabia created a shortage of labor in low paying, informal and dangerous sectors such as domestic work, construction, agriculture, and sex work (see Fernandez 2010; De Bel-Air 2014). Millions of foreign workers fill this gap, and traffickers and smugglers use this opportunity to persuade potential migrants to migrate to Saudi Arabia.

Before migrating, 45.2 percent said that they were informed about the type of work and the living conditions in Saudi Arabia. In-depth interviews revealed that even those who obtained advice and warnings from their relatives and friends were not interested in changing their decision. In many cases women want to test their chance though they had prior exposition and information about the destinations. 'Unless you experience it, you don't believe it' is the guiding principle of most migrants. However, a small majority (54.8 percent) reported that they had no prior information about life and work in Saudi Arabia. In addition, those who had prior information were asked about the accuracy of the information. From the 75 respondents who claimed they had prior knowledge, 54.7 percent said that the information they gained was misleading and deceptive. Working for multiple households and overwork (up to 24 hours), salary withholding, denial of food and rest, actual and attempted rape were things they had never been told about and they had never expected. Besides, most of those who followed legal routes were told that foreign recruitment agencies would follow up their condition and would protect their rights but in reality this never happened. Those who traveled by sea routes claimed that their voyage was painstaking and tedious which was beyond their expectations. Some of the respondents regretted that they were deceived by the understanding they had of Saudi Arabia. Likewise, some returnees said that their migration was a waste of time and believe that it is possible to earn the same salary in Ethiopia.

Ethiopian labor migrants use three main ways to go to Saudi Arabia: via work contract arranged by a Private Employment Agency (PEA), being smuggled over land and sea, and by obtaining a visa to go on *hajj* (a religious pilgrimage to Mecca). Visa for the *hajj* are only handed out to people older than 28 years. Hence, getting smuggled and going on a work contract basis are the two major means of migrating. Labor migration on the basis of a work contract is the major means to proceed to Saudi Arabia. A MOLSA report indicated that between July 2012 and July 2013, 161,787 Ethiopian migrant workers processed their migration to Saudi Arabia through Private Employment Agencies. The large majority (154,660 or 96 percent) was female; only 7,127 were male (4 percent).

The interviewed returnees had different motivations to choose a particular migration channel. The advantages of irregular channels were the costs (it is cheaper than migrating via PEAs), the fact that irregular migrants receive higher salaries, and the fact that the level of abuse is less because employers will also be held accountable for employing undocumented migrants and are therefore more careful with their treatment. The availability of the services of local brokers who facilitate irregular migration was another reason mentioned. Some respondents mentioned that they did not have to do a health screening, which can be advantageous for people with HIV/AIDS. The advantages of migrating via

PEAs were that the pain of a long trip would be avoided (they would travel by plane), the positive feeling of being documented, and the possibility of getting protection from the Ethiopian Embassy and from the PEA (though agencies and embassies were in general described as not so helpful). Most of those who went to Saudi Arabia for *haji* were working as undocumented migrants (freelancers). Freelancing is described as better because migrants can change employers since their passport will not be held by the employer or agency. The risk of freelancing is immediate deportation, which silences the migrants and gives them less power to negotiate with their employers.

### A sudden return

In the Middle East, and in particular, in the Gulf Cooperation Countries, labor migrants work under temporary contracts specified for a particular period of time. Permanent settlement and citizenship rights are inaccessible for labor migrants. The general expectation is that once the contract is finished, labor migrants will leave the country unless their residence and work permits are renewed (Jureidini 2004, 3). Labor migrants who leave their employers without consent ('run away') and those unable to renew their residence permits become undocumented and liable for arrest and deportation. Migrants who entered the country on the basis of a *haji* visa are expected to practice their religious missions. They are not allowed to engage in paid work and those who take up jobs are also liable for arrest and deportation. Migrants who came through irregular channels, are automatically denied residence and work permits unless they find a sponsor. From the information gathered we learnt that besides these conventional rules there were also people deported for 'other reasons'. These other reasons statistically represent a small number but reveal xenophobic sentiments ingrained in the minds of the people and officials of Saudi Arabia (see Jureidini 2004). Returnees and key informants mentioned a number of other factors related to the forceful expulsion in 2013–2014. One of them was that employment agencies in Saudi Arabia asked a huge amount of money to regularize the status of undocumented migrants. One returnee told us the following:

I migrated to Saudi Arabia by buying a free visa. Before the tightening of the immigration rules I was paying 800 Saudi Riyal per nine months for a fake sponsor. After the tightening of the immigration rules the alleged sponsor asked me to offer him much more than what I used to paying to renew the visa. Because I was unable to pay that amount I stayed nine months without renewed visa till the expulsion.

Other factors attributing to the termination of labor and work permits included hatred of Ethiopian migrants and the fear of the expansion of Christianity. Some interviewees said that even religious leaders were involved in the crackdown operations. A male returnee told us that a religious leader came to his house, stole his money and assaulted him badly. Returnees that encountered racism and xenophobia said that they had not yet finished their contracts but felt forced to leave. Others said that they decided to leave when they saw the atrocities inflicted on fellow Ethiopians. Migrants who did not have documents were immediately deported but those that were working with false documents (for example those who had sponsors that they did not know) had to pay large sums of money in order to get released from their sponsors.

Deportees had in most cases little to no time to prepare themselves for their return. As a result, they encountered many challenges, which affected their return home. The survey results show that only 17.9 percent of the respondents expected Saudi Arabia to implement the planned deportation measures. These respondents waited for the day of the expulsion in order to save transportation costs to return back home. However, most of the deportees were planning to stay in Saudi Arabia. When they were suddenly arrested and deported they had no time to collect their belongings or to bring sufficient money home. Because of the sudden crackdown, many returnees were forced to leave Saudi Arabia empty-handed. The survey showed that only 20.2 percent brought their possessions and 24.4 percent brought some of their belongings. Nearly a third of the respondents indicated that their belongings were either confiscated or they were not given the opportunity to bring their belongings with them. Some of them even revealed being robbed of their money (up to 15 thousands ETB) by Saudis during the crackdown. A relatively large group (24.4 percent) said that they had nothing to bring home.

Almost all of the returnees had horrific experiences between their arrest and their return home. They were imprisoned for a number of weeks, and treated very badly. They could not change their clothes, and sometimes barely had something to wear; they got very simple food and had to sleep outside in the heat. Saudi guards and policemen were sleeping next to them and female returnees told us that they were continuously on the alert fearing to be raped. Many women were sexually harassed and raped, while men were beaten up. Some of the respondents said that their experiences during their imprisonment were worse than what they had ever experienced during their stay in Saudi Arabia. As a result, many deportees were traumatized when they returned to Ethiopia.

In short, the returnees were not at all prepared for their expulsion. They were planning to stay undocumented as long as possible and had no intentions to return to Ethiopia. The violent crackdown and the subsequent arrests and deportations gave them little to no time to prepare their departure. Some returnees were able to bring their personal belongings; others were arrested and deported without having the right to prepare themselves for their return.

### **Limited embeddedness back home**

The sudden return of large numbers of migrants affected the entire country. The Ethiopian government suddenly had to take care of more than 160,000 returnees, who were in need of financial assistance, housing, employment, and health services. On a social level the sudden mass return affected the society at large; many returnees stayed in Addis Ababa because they did not want to return to their home villages empty-handed, they often had debts at home and did not want to face their families. In addition, a large number of the returnees had been traumatized and needed mental health care. Families were confronted with family members with serious mental problems, and were often unable to cope with them. In short, the scale of the mass return has been unprecedented, the government and the society at large lacked the capacity of dealing with such a high number of people in need of assistance on many levels. In this section we describe the economic, social network, and psychosocial embeddedness of the migrants following Ruben, van Houte, and Davids (2009).

### *Economic embeddedness*

In the introduction of this paper, we cited Salam who said ‘We were deported before we could experience the good sides of migration’. Just like Salam, many returnees failed to achieve their migration goals. Most Ethiopians migrate to help their families out of poverty and destitution. Family members are often involved in initiating and financing the migration project, and expect that their financial investment will be returned. Thus, remittances are expected and most returnees evaluated their migration based on the impact of their remittances on the lives of their family. Out of 168 respondents only 31 percent replied that they had achieved some or most of their goals while the majority (69 percent) said that they did not achieve any of the goals by migrating. Even fewer returnees in the second cluster replied that they were returning with debt since they had traveled through borrowing. A small percentage of returnees witnessed pervasive changes in the lives of their family (13.1 percent). 19.6 percent reported a partial change while 23.8 percent said that their remittances had only sustained family life. 25.6 percent stated that their remittances had not made any difference.

According to the interviewees, Ethiopian government officials in Saudi Arabia promised jobs and a sum of money after their expulsion but the key informant from the MOFA in Addis Ababa declined the alleged promise. Upon arrival the returnees assumed that the government would start to fulfill the promises but as time passed, the attention of the government declined and in some offices they were approached oddly. A female FGD participant indicated:

Through the five months after the return we were going from office to office, yet nothing happened ... After we returned we are being idle and use the money we brought from Saudi Arabia and are again dependent on our family.

The type and timing of assistance provided to (return) migrants can substantially contribute to improving their lives after return (Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009). If returnees are not assisted to get training and find jobs upon their return, they may become a burden on their families and may once again seek employment abroad. The returnees that were residents of Addis Ababa prior to their migration, registered at the Addis Ababa city administration. This government office was involved in the reintegration process of returnees and launched two rounds of skills training and reintegration assistance. The support program started with six days psychosocial counseling and refreshment programs. After that returnees could choose from various skills training opportunities (such as food preparation, beauty salon, urban agriculture such as poultry raising, and producing construction material such as bricks), and receive one and half month skill training at six technical and vocational colleges. After finishing the training, they obtained a certificate. The respondents were satisfied by the training but frustrated about the follow-up.

The major problem in the reintegration process was access to credit services, the provision of working sheds, and the facilitation of trade licenses. Credit access and providing sheds became bottlenecks for the reintegration assistance provision. The credit institution in charge, the Addis Credit and Saving Institution, was not prepared to provide flexible credit services for returnees. Returnees had to present as collateral either a house blueprint or a person with sufficient capital, which for many was unfeasible. In addition, providing sheds or workshops was another problem. When the sheds were available, the problems

with the credit facilities persisted, and returnees who managed to access credit or wanted to use their savings could not obtain sheds. Another problem was the lack of monitoring from the concerned bodies. Most sub-city administration offices were not prepared and interested in addressing the situation. A few sub cities tried to work toward a successful reintegration, which was confirmed by the interviewed returnees, but most of them were very frustrated about the assistance they received.

### ***The social impact of return***

A number of studies have discussed the impact of labor migration to the Middle East on marriage and family relationships (Dessiye 2011; Minaye 2012). The conventional understanding in Ethiopia is that women who worked in the Middle East were exploited and sexually abused, and therefore they are not seen as suitable marriage partners. In addition, married women's long-term absence may lead to divorce and separation. Hasena (39 years old), for example, discovered that her husband had married another woman in her absence. Yet, she was more upset about the fact that the money that she remitted to him had disappeared. She had planned to set up a small business upon return but now intends to migrate again. Many of the young women we interviewed in Addis Ababa said that they preferred to migrate again. They had not been able to find jobs and found their chances to get married minimal as a result of their low social status.

Returnees also spoke about the negative attitude of the society toward them. Social acceptance is crucial for a successful return (Van Houte and de Koning 2008). Social networks are important to become integrated in the society back home. Relations with other returnees are also essential in order to work through frustrations and traumatic experiences. 52 percent of the respondents reported that they had been able to secure strong relationships with their family and community after returning to Ethiopia. 30 percent of the survey respondents indicated that they had a weak relationship with their families and relatives. The remaining 18 percent stipulated having no relationship with their family at all. Zemzem (34 years old) returned after 14 years in Saudi Arabia and said that there was a clear relationship between sending remittances and the post-return relationship with her family:

While I was in Saudi Arabia I used to remit often. After my return I was welcomed warmly by my family. I have a strong relationship with them and I believe this relationship happens partly because I was remitting. I know a friend who didn't remit and upon return she was not received warmly by her family.

Yet, there were also many returnees whose relatives were happy that they returned home. The stories of the violent crackdown and the subsequent treatment of arrested migrants had worried many people, and family members were often relieved when their beloved ones returned home alive. Salam had called her family when she was in the prison, and they told her that they preferred seeing her back in one piece than to receive her money. Many returnees said that they were relieved to be home, but very disappointed that they returned empty-handed. Their economic situation affected their psychosocial well-being, and a considerable number of respondents thought of migrating again.



## ***Psychosocial problems***

As described earlier, the days of the crackdown and expulsion were tied to a variety of horrific experiences, which affected the psychosocial state of the returnees to a large extent. The coordinator of the repatriation process described the situation upon arrival at the airport:

Some of returnees were taking their clothes off and walked around naked. Some had mental problems but others hated the clothes they were wearing as they reminded them of what they had gone through.

Migrants with mental problems were referred to the only mental hospital in Addis Ababa, which was rapidly filled with returnees. The government lacked the capacity to take care of the large numbers of people that were in need of mental care. A number of Ethiopian non-governmental organizations took care of the traumatized returnees, hosting them in shelters and giving them psychological counseling. Yet, the magnitude of the deportation affected the country at large and many families had to cope with relatives that were traumatized. The fact that the returnees were forcefully expelled, and hardly had time to prepare their departure affected their mental state. They failed in realizing their migration goals; they had not been able to remit money or to save money to pay back their debts. This created a lot of tension and stress and mental problems. In addition, their experiences living and working in Saudi Arabia had a strong impact on their mindset. One of the female returnees said:

Before leaving to an Arab country I was decent and respected the orders of my family but the exposure to the Arab way of life and experiencing bad things changed my conduct. After return, I don't have peace with my family. What they say, even if it is positive, to me it is negative. I am confronting them all the time and disagree with my family and I realize that I am behaving terribly.

A number of returnees also spoke about the problems related to the attitude of the society toward their return. They felt stigmatized and discriminated against, which affected their mental stability. As a result, they did not feel at home in Ethiopia and had no peace of mind. They had not intended to return home and their forceful expulsion affected their psychological embeddedness to a large extent.

## **Conclusion**

The large-scale return of Ethiopian migrants from Saudi Arabia constituted a group of forced return migrants that were very badly prepared for their return. Cassarino (2004) stated that the way in which migrants are prepared for their return home, and in particular the way in which they are able to mobilize resources, are crucial for a successful return home. Most of the returnees had shown no desire to return to Ethiopia until the Saudi Arabia security forces began the crackdown. Within the seven months of the amnesty period, only 5,000 Ethiopians repatriated. According to Ghanem (2003) if returnees have no desire to return in the first place, it cannot be expected that they will easily reintegrate and view their country of origin as their 'home'. Our research results support these statements. While many of the respondents were happy to be home in the early days of their repatriation, because of the traumatic experiences during their arrest and imprisonment in Saudi Arabia, they were frustrated a few months later. They had expected more assistance from the Ethiopian government to establish their lives back home economically, yet they



had only received attention in the first few months of their return. Almost all of them complained about the lack of opportunities and facilities to realize their aspirations to work or set up a business. Their economic embeddedness was thus very limited if not non-existent. Many respondents were depending on their relatives. This is in accordance with the findings of Ruben, van Houte, and Davids (2009) who also found that the returnees were economically not well-established, even years after their return. Yet, this limited economic embeddedness is a direct result of the fact that they were forcefully expelled and had no time to prepare themselves for their return. The psychosocial embeddedness of the Ethiopian returnees was also low. Many still struggled with what they had gone through in Saudi Arabia, and the fact that they returned almost empty-handed. Their psychosocial embeddedness was thus also related to the lack of preparedness for their return; they had not been able to mobilize resources and considered themselves failures. This also impacted on their social network embeddedness because they were unable to build up a social network back home, and relied heavily on their relatives. The fact that the Ethiopian government has not been able to improve the returnees' economic embeddedness has therefore wider implications than economically only. Many returnees may opt to migrate again, and in the absence of policies that protect migrants they will make use of irregular channels. They will be undocumented in the countries of migration and again run the risk of deportation.

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## Notes

1. The Saudi government had launched earlier policies that aimed to reduce foreign labor in favor of Saudi nationals (see De Bel-Air 2014, 4; RMMS 2014, 10). Yet, these efforts had limited result, which was mainly because Saudi nationals were unwilling to engage in low-skilled jobs, expected higher salaries and were lacking the skills and training required for much of the work in the private sector (De Bel-Air 2014, 5).
2. In the spring of 2015, the increasing death toll of migrants in the Mediterranean led to new debates about undocumented migrants and their possible return in Europe.
3. For training purposes, to process papers for the businesses they intended to set up, for meetings with government officials to ask for support, for work and for study.
4. The five areas were the Ethiopian Assembly Hall, the Yeka sub-city meeting hall, the Bole sub-city meeting hall, Misrak TVET and Gulele area, where some returnees started working through government support.

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